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Duxbury Clipper

Managers' union issues surface

The biggest story no one at town hall was talking about in 2008 — at least on the record — was the effort to establish a managers' union.

In May, residents learned that several department heads and mid-level managers, led by Duxbury Police Chief Mark DeLuca and Library Director Elaine Winquist, were attempting to form the union.

TOP STORIES OF 2008

The issue, according to union leaders, was not money or advancement but job security. The

union was called the Duxbury Professional Employees Association, or DPEA.

Town employees not part of any collective bargaining unit are covered by a personnel by-law, a document that officials on both sides of this story agreed was in need of updating. Winquist called it a "dog of a plan."

"Why should people who work for us be offered certain protections and benefits that we don't get? The idea of a union is to ensure equity and fair treatment across the board," said DeLuca.

Pro-union forces pointed to



towns where department head bargaining agreements were in place, such as Stoughton.

Under the current bylaw, employees covered can be terminated by the town manager, and association members were looking to have a process where employees could appeal to an outside arbitrator.

"If you can be fair and non-biased, why would you fear a third party?" asked member Paul Anderson, the town's water and sewer superintendent.

After the initial story of the effort to form a union surfaced, the story became more about the lack of news. Negotiations bogged down, reportedly over which employees could join such a union. Town officials were reluctant to comment on an ongoing labor issue.

"I wish I could comment," Selectman Andre Martecchini said when the story first broke.

Although union members stressed that the push for collective bargaining was not the actions of a few disgruntled employees, not all managers were happy with the move.

"We have a long history of working together. I see this as pulling us all apart," said a Town Hall employee, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Another employee cited fears of retaliation for not supporting the new union.

Initially, the DPEA members had appealed to the state labor board in an attempt to have their organization recognized, but the application was later withdrawn.

The group went back before the labor board, but as a part of the larger Service Employees International Union, or SEIU. In a paid advertisement in the Clipper, the members of the DPEA decried the town's "stalling, controlling practices and legal maneuvering."

Town officials denied the changes.

"We've been desperately trying to get them to come to the table," said Martecchini.

While the process appears to be moving toward a conclusion, as 2008 comes to an end the issue remains unresolved.